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## II. An Account of an ancient Irish Reliquary, called the Domnach-Airgid. By George Petrie, Esq., R.H.A., M.R.I.A.

Read 22nd October, 1832; and 9th January, 1837.

THE ancient cumdachs, or ornamental cases, in which the Irish were accustomed to preserve their early religious manuscripts and other relics, have been within a few years elaborately illustrated and familiarized to the learned by the Rev. Dr. O'Conor, and still more recently by Sir William Betham. Till that period the present existence of those interesting monuments of our ancient literature and art was scarcely known to the literary world, as they were generally concealed in the hands of poor and illiterate persons, by whom they were preserved, and transmitted from generation to generation, either from a veneration for their supposed sanctity, or as a means of support, derived from their frequent application among the vulgar to superstitious purposes. In this manner, and from both the considerations alluded to, the very singular piece of antiquity, which I have now the honor of exhibiting to the Academy, has been long preserved and employed, as, while its safe keeping was considered by its possessors to be a religious duty, it was nevertheless hired out into the surrounding district on a sufficient deposit, and for a small consideration; sometimes that persons suspected or accused of crime might exonerate themselves from the imputation by an oath taken on its contents—a practice apparently derived from the ancient use of the sacred volume which it contains; at other times for the application of its supposed miraculous power in removing diseases both from men and cattle—a superstition probably originating in the use of the relics which it was supposed to enshrine. From such uses, and the great probability of ultimate destruction, it has fortunately been rescued by the enterprising spirit of its present possessor, Mr. Smith of College-green, the bookseller, by whom it was recently purchased in the neighbourhood of Clones in the county of Monaghan, its original locality, from one of the Maguire family, descended of the ancient lords of Fermanagh.

In its present state this ancient remain appears to have been equally designed as a shrine for the preservation of relics and of a book; but the latter was probably its sole original use. Its form is that of an oblong box, nine inches by seven, and five inches in height.

This box is composed of three distinct covers, of which the first, or inner one, is of wood—yew; the second, or middle one, of copper, plated with silver; and the third, or outer one, of silver, plated with gold.

In the comparative ages of these several covers, there is obviously a great difference. The first may probably be coeval with the manuscript which it was intended to preserve; the second, in the style of its scroll, or interlaced, ornament, indicates a period between the sixth and twelfth centuries; while the figures in relief, the ornaments, and the letters on the third, or outer cover, leave no doubt of its being the work of the fourteenth century.

This last, or external cover, is of great interest, as a specimen of the skill and taste in art of its time in Ireland, and also for the highly finished representations of ancient costume which it preserves. The ornaments on the top consist chiefly of a large figure of the Saviour in alto relievo in the centre, and eleven figures of saints in basso relievo on each side, in four oblong compartments. At the head of the Saviour there is a representation of the dove, or Holy Ghost, enamelled in gold; and over this a small square reliquary, covered with a crystal, and which probably contains a supposed piece of the true cross. diately over this again is a shield, on which the implements of the passion are emblazoned in blue and red paste; and above this there is another square reliquary, similarly covered with crystal, but of smaller size. The smaller figures in relief are, in the first compartment, the Irish saints-Columb, Brigid, and Patrick; in the second, the apostles James, Peter, and Paul; in the third, the Archangel Michael and the Virgin and Child; and in the fourth, a bishop presenting a cumdach, or cover, to an ecclesiastic—a device which has evidently an historical relation to the reliquary itself, and which shall be noticed here-There is a third figure in this compartment which I am unable to explain.

It should be observed, that these figures have been arranged by a person recently employed to repair the case, in a different order from their original one, as here given on the authority of one of a set of drawings of this reliquary, previously made, with which I have been favored by my friend Sir W. Betham.

The rim is ornamented on its two external faces with various grotesque devices, executed with very considerable skill, and the angles were enriched with pearls, probably native, or other precious jewels. A tablet on the rim, and at the upper side, presents the following inscription in the Monkish character used in the 13th and 14th centuries:

"JOHS: O KARBRI: COMORBANUS: S: TIGNACII: PMISIT."

Or with the contractions lengthened; thus:

JOHANNES O KARBRI COMORBANUS [SUCCESSOT] SANCTI TIGHERNACII PERMISIT.

Another inscription, in the same character, preserves the name of the artist by whom those embellishments on the outer case were executed, and is valuable as proving that this interesting specimen of ancient art was not of foreign manufacture. It will be found on a small moulding over one of the tablets:

"JOHANES: O BARRDAN: FABRICAVIT."

The front side of the case presents three convex pateræ, ornamented, in a very elegant style of art, with figures of grotesque animals and traceries: they are enamelled with a blue paste, and have in the centre of each cup an uncut crystal covering relics like those on the top. An interesting feature on this side is the figure of a chief or nobleman on horseback, with sword in hand. It exhibits with minute accuracy the costume of the nobility in Ireland during the 14th century.

The ornaments contained within the rim, on the back or opposite side, are lost, and their place has been supplied by the recent repairer, with figures which originally belonged to the right and left sides. These figures are, however, restored to their proper places in the accompanying plates, on the authority of Sir W. Betham's drawings; from which it appears that these sides were originally ornamented with figures in relief, like those on the top.

On the right hand side, the upper compartment presents a figure of St. Catherine with those of a monk in the attitude of prayer on the left, and a boy incensing on the right: these latter figures are not in relief, but are engraved on the field of the tablet. The second, or lower compartment of this side is lost.

On the left hand side, the upper compartment presents the figure of an ecclesiastic seated on a chair or throne, his left hand holding a small cross, and his

right hand raised in the act of giving the benediction: figures incensing are engraved on the field. This principal figure probably represents S. Mac Carthen, or St. Tighernach. The under compartment exhibits a figure of St. John the Baptist holding in his left hand a round medallion or picture of the Lamb; and in his right hand a scroll, on which is inscribed the words, "Ecce Agnus Dei." A figure of the daughter of Herodias with the head of St. John on a salver, appears engraved on the field.—(See Plate III.)

In consequence of the removal of these tablets to the back, as already stated, the more ancient plated cover has become exposed on the two ends, as shown in Plate IV.

The bottom, or back, of the case is ornamented with a large cross, on which there is an inscription in the gothic or black letter. This inscription is of a later age than those already noticed, but I am unable, from its injured state, to decipher it wholly. It concludes with the word "tloathar," the name of the see, to which, as I shall presently show, the reliquary originally appertained.

I now come to the most important portion of this remarkable monument of antiquity,—the treasure for whose honor and preservation so much cost and labour were expended. It is a Latin manuscript of the Gospels; but of what text or version I am unable, in its present state, to offer an opinion, as the membranes are so tenaciously incorporated by time that I dare not venture, through fear of injuring, to separate them. These Gospels are separate from each other, and three of them appear to be perfect; but the fourth, which is the Gospel of St. Matthew, is considerably injured in the beginning, and from this two leaves have been detached, which have enabled us to ascertain the subject of, as well as the form of letter used in, the manuscript, -namely, the Uncial or corrupt Roman character, popularly called Irish, and similar in appearance to the very ancient manuscripts of the Gospels preserved in the library of Trinity College. That it is of equal antiquity with those manuscripts—which are of the sixth century—I have little doubt; and from evidences which I shall presently adduce, I think it not unlikely to be of an even earlier age,—perhaps the oldest copy of the Sacred Word now existing.

I shall endeavour to arrange these evidences in consecutive order.

1. It is of importance to prove that this *cumdach*, or reliquary, has been from time immemorial popularly known by the name of *Domnach*, or, as it is provol. XVIII.

nounced, Donagh, a word derived from the Latin *Dominicus*. This fact is proved by a recent popular tale of very great power, by Mr. Carleton, called the "Donagh," in which the superstitious uses to which this reliquary has been long applied, are ably exhibited, and made subservient to the interests of the story. It is also particularly described under this name by the Rev. John Groves, in his account of the Parish of Errigal-Keeroge, in the third volume of Shaw Mason's Parochial Survey, page 163, though, as the writer states, it was not actually preserved in that parish.

- 2. The inscriptions on the external case leave no doubt that the Domnach belonged to the monastery of Clones, or see of Clogher. The John O'Karbri, the Comharb, or successor of St. Tighernach, recorded in one of those inscriptions as the person at whose cost, or by whose permission the outer ornamental case was made, was, according to the Annals of the Four Masters, Abbot of Clones, and died in the year 1353. He is properly called in that inscription Comorbanus, or successor of Tighernach, who was the first Abbot and Bishop of the Church of Clones, to which place, after the death of St. Mac-Carthen in the year 506, he removed the see of Clogher, having erected a new church, which he dedicated to the apostles Peter and Paul. St. Tighernach, according to all our ancient authorities, died in the year 548.
- 3. It appears from a fragment of an ancient life of St. Mac-Carthen, preserved by Colgan, that a remarkable reliquary was given by St. Patrick to that saint when he placed him over the see of Clogher.
- "Et addidit, [Patricius] Accipe, inquit, baculum itineris mei, quo ego membra mea sustento, et scrinium in quo de sanctorum Apostolorum reliquiis, et de sanctæ Mariæ capillis, et sancta Cruce Domini, et sepulchro ejus, et aliis reliquiis sanctis continentur. Quibus dictis dimisit cum osculo pacis paterna fultum benedictione."—Colgan, Vit. S. Macaerthenni (24 Mart.) Acta SS. p. 738.

From this passage we learn one great cause of the sanctity in which this reliquary was held, and of the uses of the several recesses for reliques which it presents. It also explains the historical *relievo* on the top—the figure of St. Patrick presenting the Domnach to S. Mac-Carthen.

4. In Jocelyn's Life of St. Patrick, (cap. 143,) we have also a notice to the same effect, but in which the Domnach is called a *Chrismatorium*, and the relics are not specified,—in all probability because they were not then appended to it.

In these authorities there is evidently much appearance of the Monkish

frauds of the middle ages, but still they are evidences of the tradition of the country that such a gift had been made by Patrick to Mac-Carthen. And as we advance higher in chronological authorities we find the notice of this gift stripped of much of its acquired garb of fiction, and related with more of the simplicity of truth.

- 5. In the life of St. Patrick called the Tripartite, usually ascribed to St. Evin, an author of the seventh century, and which even in its present interpolated state is confessedly prior to the tenth, there is the following remarkable passage (as translated by Colgan from the original Irish) relative to the gift of the Domnach from the Apostle of Ireland to St. Mac-Carthen, in which it is expressly described under the very same appellation which it still bears.
- "Aliquantis ergo evolutis diebus Mac-Caertennum, sive Caerthennum Episcopum præfecit sedi Episcopali Clocherensi, ab Ardmacha regni Metropoli haud multum distanti: et apud eum reliquit argenteum quoddam reliquiarium Domnach-airgidh vulgò nuncupatum; quod viro Dei, in Hiberniam venienti, cælitus missum erat."—VII. Vita S. Patricii, Lib. 111. cap. 3, Tr. Th. p. 149.

This passage is elsewhere given by Colgan, with a slight change of words in the translation, as follows:

"Aliquantis igitur evolutis diebus S. Maccaerthennum Episcopum, præfecit sedi Clocharensi ab Ardmacha regni Metropoli haud multum distanti: et apud eum reliquit argenteum quoddam reliquiarium Domnach-airgid vulgo appellatum, quod viro Dei in Hiberniam venienti cælitus missum erat."—Vita S. Maccaerthenni (24 Mart.) AA.SS. p. 738.

In this passage, which is unquestionably prior to all the others, we find the Domnach distinguished by the appellation of Airgid—an addition which was applicable only to its more ancient or silver plated case, and which could not with propriety be applied to its more recent covering, which in its original state had the appearance of being of gold.

On these evidences—and more might probably be procured if time had allowed—we may, I think, with tolerable certainty, rest the following conclusions:

- 1. That the Domnach is the identical reliquary given by St. Patrick to St. Mac-Carthen.
- 2. As the form of the cumdach indicates that it was intended to receive a book, and as the relics are all attached to the outer and least ancient cover, it is

manifest that the use of the box as a reliquary was not its original intention. The natural inference therefore is, that it contained a manuscript which had belonged to St. Patrick; and as a manuscript copy of the Gospels, apparently of that early age, is found within it, there is every reason to believe it to be that identical one for which the box was originally made, and which the Irish apostle probably brought with him on his mission into this country. It is indeed, not merely possible, but even probable, that the existence of this manuscript was unknown to the Monkish biographers of St. Patrick and St. Mac-carthen, who speak of the box as a scrinium or reliquary only. The outer cover was evidently not made to open; and some, at least, of the relics attached to it were not introduced into Ireland before the twelfth century. It will be remembered also that no superstition was and is more common in connexion with the ancient cumdachs than the dread of their being opened.

These conclusions will, I think, be strengthened considerably by the facts, that the word Domnach, as applied either to a church, as usual, or to a reliquary, as in this instance, is only to be found in our histories in connexion with St. Patrick's time; and, that in the latter sense—its application to a reliquary—it only once occurs in all our ancient authorities, namely, in the single reference to the gift to St. Mac-Carthen; no other reliquary in Ireland, as far as can be ascertained, having ever been known by that appellation. And it should also be observed, that all the ancient reliques preserved in Ireland, whether bells, books, croziers, or other remains, have invariably, and without any single exception, been preserved and venerated only as appertaining to the original founders of the churches to which they belonged.

Since the preceding pages were written, the Domnach has become the property of the Hon. Henry R. Westenra, at a cost of three hundred pounds. That truly patriotic gentleman immediately on his becoming the possessor of this interesting monument of the *Insula Sacra*, honored me with a request that I would communicate to the Academy and to the University, that, as his only object in becoming its purchaser was that it might not pass out of Ireland, he would be at all times ready to surrender it to either of these national institutions, as a proper depository for its preservation, at a loss of a portion of the sum which it cost him. A liberality so enlightened will, I have no doubt, be admired and honored.

I also avail myself of this opportunity to add, that, having been favored, recently, by Mr. Westenra, with a loan of the Domnach for further examination, I requested my friend, the Rev. Mr. Todd, to examine the detached membranes of the manuscript, and to give me his opinion respecting the antiquity of the version and age of the writing, as far as the fragments would permit such opinion to be formed. I now add his transcript of what was legible, together with his remarks; and I am authorized by him to state, that although he at first thought the contractions used in the fragment,—and especially the (;) in the contraction usq;—to argue a later date than the historical evidences indicated, he has since seen reason to change his opinion. While this sheet was passing through the press, he took the opportunity of re-considering the subject, by a careful examination of the valuable manuscripts of the Gospels preserved in the Library of Trinity College; and he now thinks that the contractions of the Domnach manuscript might have been in use in the fourth or fifth centuries.

It should be observed, that the type in which the following fragments are printed is not to be considered as a fac-simile of the MS., in which the letters are larger, but it will give a very good general idea of the character, having been cast from the best specimens of Irish MSS. of the sixth and seventh centuries.

## COLLATION OF TWO LEAVES OF THE DOMNACH-AIRGID MANUSCRIPT.

~ .	-	•	•
H'AI		tn.	ana a
Fol.	1.	IU	

	Mat. i
	1
⊏เดมเล เษิ	
σαιίο είδιι αρκα	
am abracham	2
gennic issac issac & gennic ia	
сор іасори. Денпіс іпрашес Ека	
eius-iuoas 1r zuic pra	3
TRES 18 et zaram	

- Ver. 1. A space is left for an illuminated L, of which some faint traces still remain.
- Ver. 2. Isaac autem.-Vulg. The Versio Antiqua (ap. Sabatier) omits autem.
- Ver. 3. A stop between ejus and Judas in the middle of the line. The reading appears to have been "Judas autem genuit fratres pharis et zaram," a reading altogether peculiar.

Fol	1	dorso.
LOI.	1,	worso.

αδια	7
Huic assa assa it genuic	8
c iosaphac ir genuic io	
ram ioram ir zenuic oziam ozi	9
аз и денит госнат госна и дени	
ic achaz achas ir Zennic ezechi	
am ezechias ir zenuiz	10
sen manesses to genuit	
т. дениіс iosias	

Mat. i.

Ver. 7, 8. This is evidently the modern Vulgate; the old version reads Abiud, instead of Abia, or Abias; and Asaph, instead of Asa or Assa.—Vid. Sabatier.

Ver. 10. Josias.—This word is very obscure; the second 1 in the original is elongated below the line, and has a curved line of over it.

## Fol. 2, facie.

eciu 5e	Mat. 1. 15
th de iacor iacor in dennic	16
Ошнея екдо денекастонея	17
as asracham usq; as dauid	
generationes XIIII et a panip	
usq; ad transmitratione basis	
nis generaciones xiiii ec a crans	
шідкастоне разіконів ned: ар	
criscim generaciones x	

Ver. 15. A part of this verse appears to have been omitted, as there is not room left for the whole in the manuscript.

Ver. 16. The clause "virum Mariæ, &c." appears to have been omitted. This clause is given very variously in manuscripts, the Vulgate reads "Virum Mariæ, de qua natus est Jesus, qui vocatur Christus." The ancient version (in Sabatier) reads, "Cui desponsata virgo Maria. Maria autem genuit Jesum, qui dicitur Christus." One manuscript in the Library of Trinity College (the book of Dimma) unites both readings thus, "Virum Mariæ de qua natus est Jesus Christus. Cui dispon-

sata virgo Maria. Maria autem genuit Jesum qui dicitur Christus." The Domnach manuscript appears to be singular in omitting the whole clause.

Ver. 17. Omnes ergo.—The modern vulgate reads itaque, the ancient version ergo, as in this manuscript. In the rest of the verse this manuscript agrees with the modern, and differs from the ancient version, which reads "generationes sunt xiv." in the three places.

The back of this leaf is altogether illegible.

The contractions used in this fragment are  $1\bar{h}$  for Jesus (ver. 1); In for autem (passim); ze for genuit (ver. 16); (;) in upq; for usque; and a line over  $\bar{e}$  for em (ver. 17). The only stop visible is that already noticed in ver. 3.



To the preceding addenda, it will not, I trust, be considered irrelevant to add a notice of an ancient seal of an abbot of the church in which the Domnach was preserved, and which has the appropriate device,—a figure of the patron saint holding a crosier with one hand, and a book, having a cumdach, or ornamented case, with the other. It is indeed not improbable that this seal was made for the very abbot, John O'Carbrie, by whom the outer cover was put on the Domnach; but on this point no conclusion is rested, as, unfortunately, the surname of the abbot is the only portion of the inscription difficult to be deciphered. It may, however, be remarked, that no other Abbot of Clones, having the Christian name of John, is found in the Irish annals, and that the style of the device and character of the letters on the seal belong to the fourteenth century, the period in which that abbot flourished.

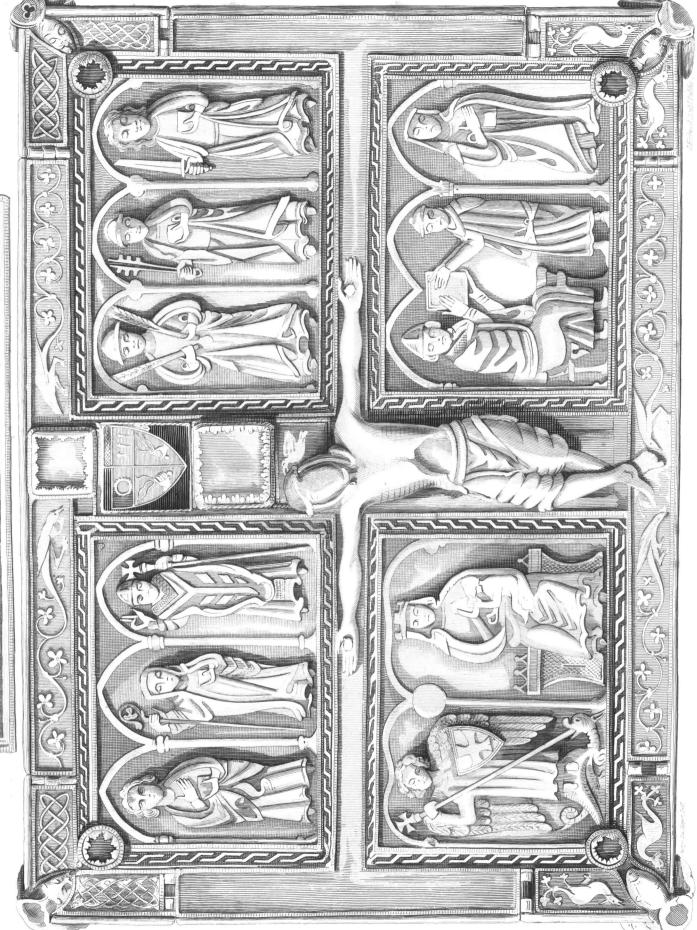
The inscription is as follows:

SPRISIOHISVCCO-IRVABISDOMUSAPLORPPDECLVAIEOVS.

Or with the words divided and the contractions lengthened, thus:

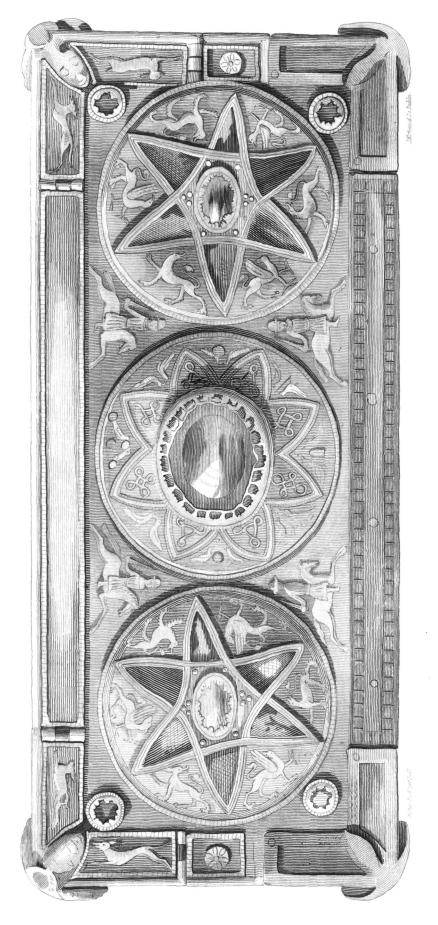
SIGILLUM PATRIS JOHANNIS V CCO-IRV ABBATIS DOMUS APOSTOLORUM PETRI ET PAULI DE CLUAINEOUS.

The matrices of this and another ancient seal of the clergy of the bishopric of Kilmore were found two or three years since in an island of Lough-Erne, and are now preserved in the British Museum.



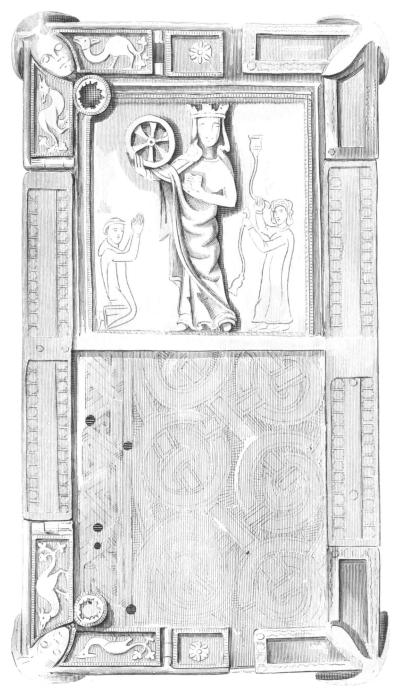
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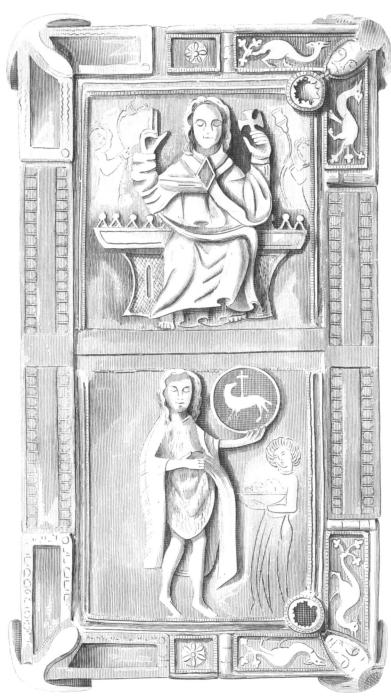
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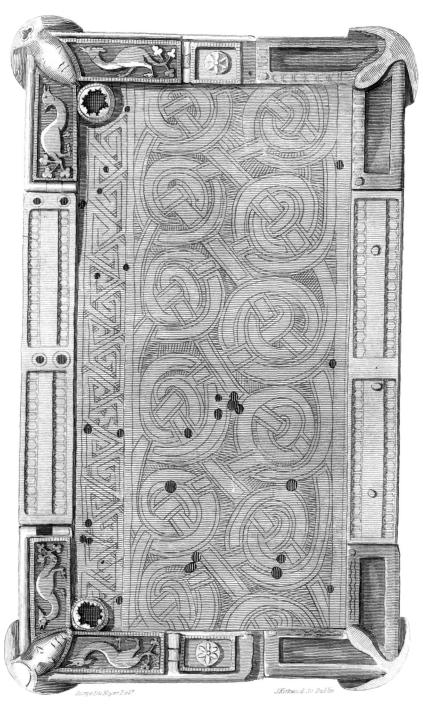
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Sims R.I. ACATEMY, VALTMIL Artiguities p. 3.





Literary Live Stability



ANCIENT END SIDE OF THE DOMNACH AIRCID

